DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 824 CS 007 940

AUTHOR Maring, Gerald H.; Warner, Dennis
TITLE Are Our College-Bound Juniors and Seniors Mature Readers?
PUB DATE Feb 84
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Reading Research Conference of the Washington Organization for Reading Development of the International Reading Association (9th, February 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Bound Students; College Freshmen; Comparative Analysis; High Schools; High School Students; *Reading Habits; *Reading Interests; *Reading Research; *Recreational Reading; *Rural Youth; School Surveys; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A 15-minute reading inventory was administered to 188 students in seven rural districts to assess and compare the reading maturity of the college-bound juniors and seniors in those districts. Results showed that on a leisure reading attitude scale, the college-bound students had an average score of 60 points with 20 being the lowest and 100 the highest possible scores. Rural students spent an average of 68 minutes reading leisure books on a typical vacation day. They also reported reading 12 different kinds of books during the past year. When the findings were compared with those of a nationally representative sampling of seventh grade students and college freshmen, it was determined that there were no significant differences among the various groups in attitude toward leisure book reading. However, the rural, college-bound high school student group did spend more time in leisure book reading during vacation times than did university freshmen. Also, the rural group's average time devoted to leisure book reading was significantly greater than the average times of each of the other groups. Finally, the rural high school students seemed to have a wider breadth of reading interests and listed more reasons for reading than did university freshmen. (The paper includes 15 suggestions for developing maturity in reading in small, rural schools.) (HOD)

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ARE OUR COLLEGE-BOUND JUNIORS AND SENIORS MATURE READERS?

Gerald H. Maring, Associate Professor

Dennis Warner, Professor

Department of Education
Washington State University
Pullman, WA. 99164-2110

Explains how a small grant provided answers and 15 ways any small, rural school can develop more mature readers.

In our part of rural America, 50 out of the 60 school districts within 100 miles of our land grant university have total enrollments of less than 200 students. Yes, we live in what many would call rural isolation.

Are the college-bound juniors and seniors in these schools avid book readers? Do they have positive attitudes toward leisure reading? Do they spend an adequate amount of time in leisure book reading? Do they read in a wide variety of interest areas? Ideally, the answers to these questions should be "Yes," for mature readers devour books. Certainly, avid reading is one of the best "windows to the world" anyone can have in a rural area. Maturity in reading can greatly broaden the horizons of individuals who live anywhere in our society, but it can be particularly helpful for individuals who live in isolated areas.

We received a small grant from our Educational Service District's in-service funds to assess and compare the reading maturity of the college-bound juniors and seniors in seven districts. The purpose of the project was to focus the attention of both teachers and students on the topic of maturity in reading, and then to offer the participating teachers a variety of suggestions by which reading maturity could be enhanced.

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Assessment Procedures

Seven teachers from seven different districts attended the introductory worksnop. They came from schools whose combined junior and senior classes ranged from 18 students in the smallest district to 35 students in the district with the largest number of juniors and seniors. In our area, most of the high school graduates chose to go on to one form or another of higher education, with most of them electing to attend private or state universities.

During the project's first workshop, we shared with the teachers a "Reading Inventory" which they would administer and which we would score, interpret, and return to their districts in the form of summary reports.

The "Reading Inventory" consisted of the following four parts:

1. The 20 item, Likert-type Dulin-Chester (1977) Scale of Attitudes toward Leisure Book Reading
   For example:

   Which would you rather do?

This...			or			This...
listen to the radio	1 pt.	2 pts.	3 pts.	4 pts.	5 pts.	read a book

2. Six questions related to time spent in leisure book reading. For example:

   On an average day during vacation, how much time would you say you spend reading books of your own choosing

   _____ about 5 minutes or less
   _____ about 15 minutes
   _____ about ½ hour
   _____ about 1 hour
   _____ about 1½ hours
   _____ about 2 hours
   _____ about 2½ hours or more

3. A 50 item checklist of kinds of books read during the last year. For example:

   Put an X before the kinds of books you have actually read in your free time during the last year.

   _____ Adventure
   _____ Africa, China, or foreign countries
   _____ Modern history
   _____ American bicentennial
   _____ Animal stories
   _____ Flying
   _____ Space
   _____ Lives of real persons
   _____ Boating and ships
   _____ Hobbies or making things

4. A 25 item checklist of reasons for reading. For example:

   Put an X before the reasons why you have read books of your own choosing during your free time.

   _____ for fun and enjoyment
   _____ to learn more about a hobby or special interest
   _____ to learn more about how different people live
   _____ to get further information about current events (news, politics or sports)
   _____ to learn more about life in the past
   _____ to find out what life may be like in the future
   _____ to answer questions about a topic

Altogether, 188 students completed this 15-minute survey.

Sharing the Results

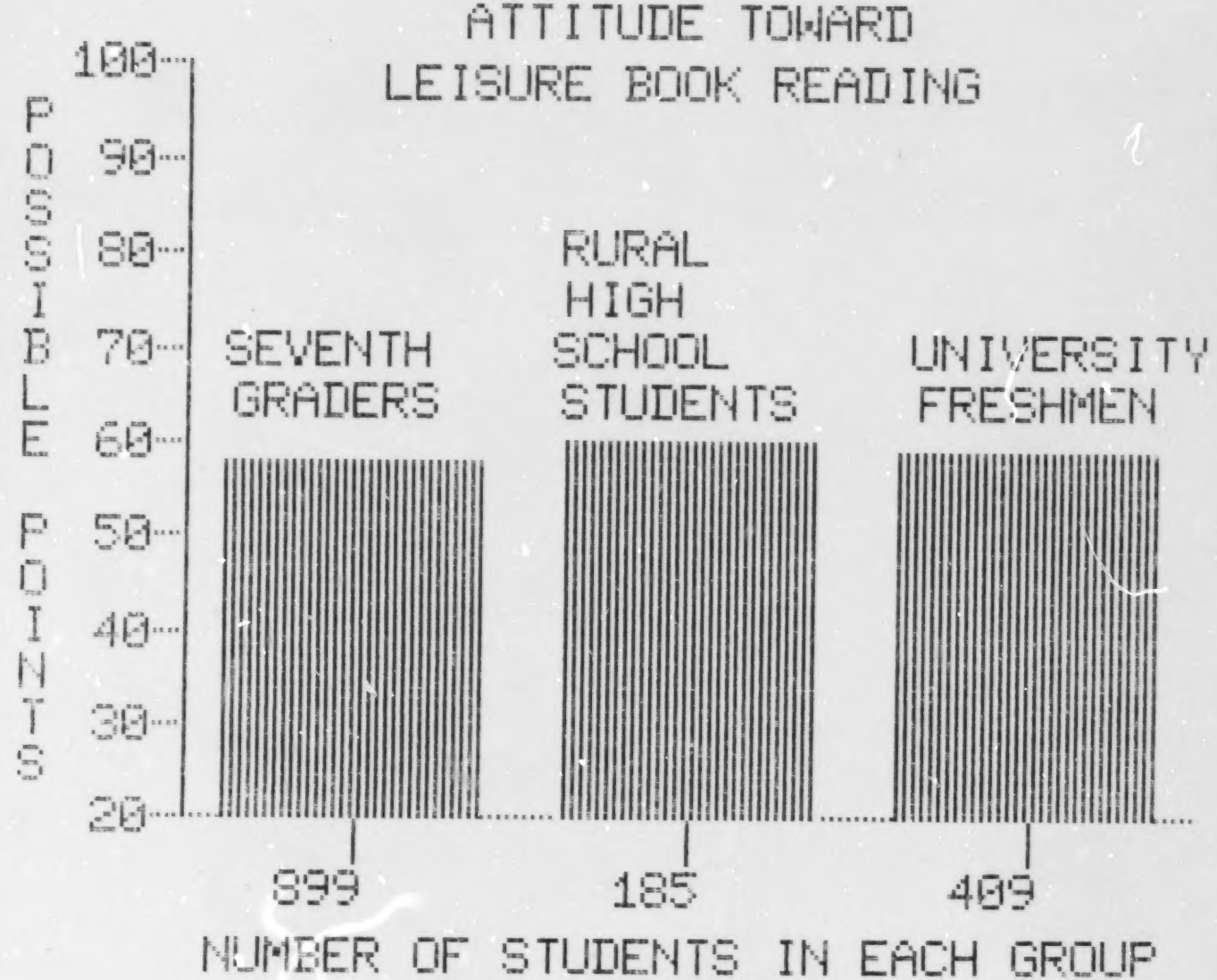
Each district mailed back its package of completed inventories so we could score, computerize, and interpret the results and then share the general findings with the teachers at our second workshop, scheduled a month after the first.

On the Attitude Toward Leisure Book Reading scale, the 188 college-bound students had an average score of 60 points. The lowest possible

score any student could have reported would have been a 20 and the highest score possible would have been a 100, if the student put all her "X's" nearest the words "read a book." We explained to the teachers that in 1976 a nationally representative group of 899 seventh graders had an average score of 57 points and that 145 of these seventh graders (who were identified by their teachers as "most mature" readers) had an average score of 70 points on this attitude scale. Thus, without using any statistical comparisons, it appeared that the college-bound student in our rural area had scores similar to a large group of seventh graders, but somewhat lower than the scores of the most avid seventh grade readers. We shared with the teachers another comparison related to attitude toward leisure book reading. We pointed out that 409 college freshmen (representative of the 3,000 freshmen at our state land-grant university) had an average attitude toward leisure book reading score of 58. We summed up these results with the observation that on the face of things, the small, rural schools juniors and seniors had about average attitudes toward leisure book reading. Figure 1 summarizes these findings.

Insert Figure 1

The second part of the maturity in reading inventory dealt with time spent in leisure book reading. The rural students' average minutes-spent in leisure book reading on a typical vacation day was 68 minutes. We noted for the teachers that 145 mature seventh grade readers also reported 68 minutes, whereas the entire group of 899 seventh graders had an average


ATTITUDE TOWARD
LEISURE BOOK READING
POSSIBLE POINTS
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
SEVENTH GRADERS
RURAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN
899
185
409
NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN EACH GROUP

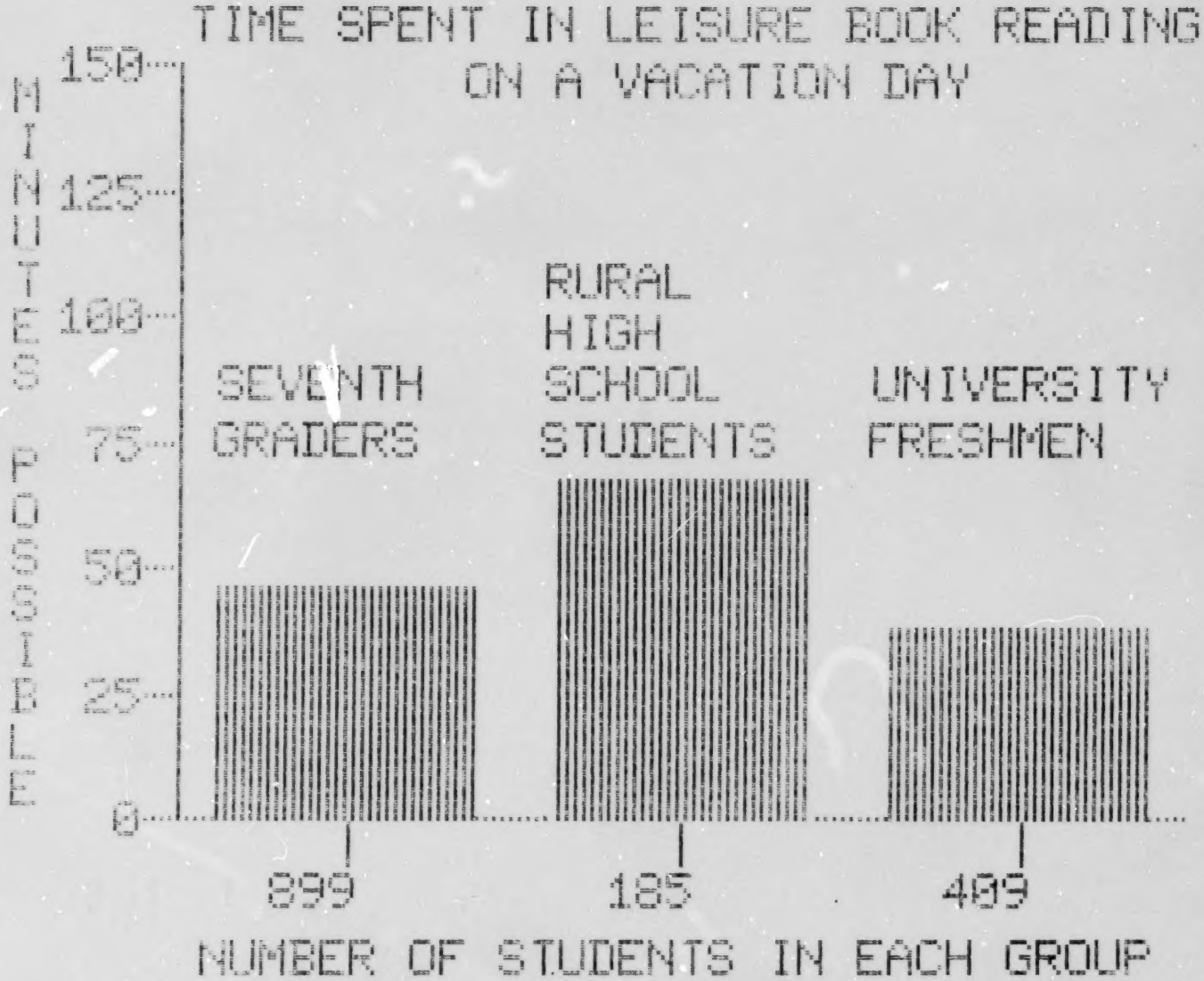
score of 46 minutes. The representative group of freshmen at our university had an even lower score of 38 minutes. Figure 2 summarizes these findings.

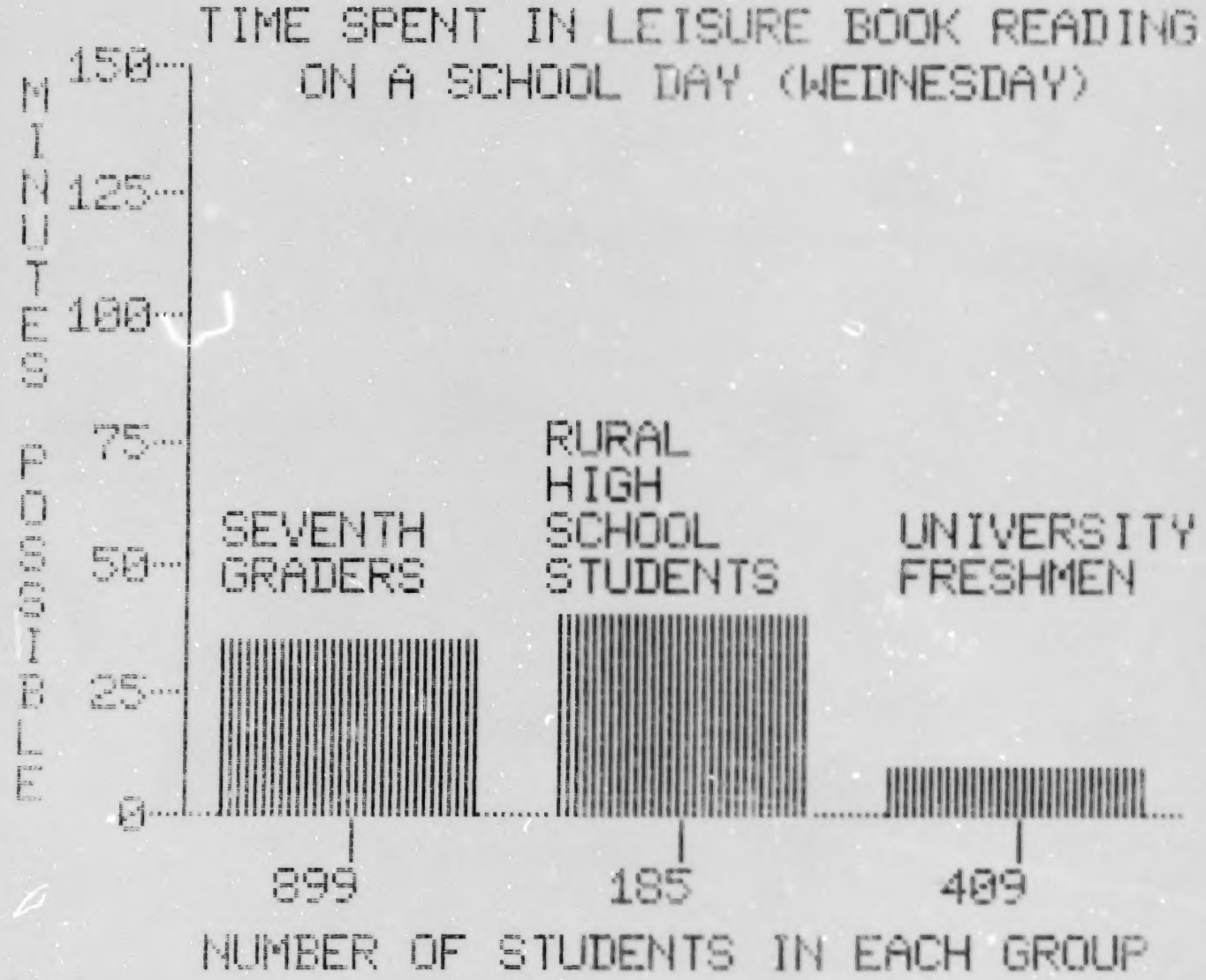
Insert Figure 2

The last question on the time spent in leisure reading section of the inventory yielded some interesting results. Unlike the first three questions, which covered days in which school was not in session, question number 6 specified a "typical" school day, a Wednesday. The rural groups' average minutes devoted to leisure book reading was 40 minutes. This average appeared to be slightly more than the 35 minutes reported by the 899 seventh graders. However, on the face of it, it appeared to be considerably above the 10 minutes reported by the 409 typical university freshmen. Apparently university freshmen have either a lot of homework or a lot of distractions which compete heavily against leisure book reading during a day in which classes are in session. Again, the rural group appeared to be the most avid book readers during "Wednesday of last week." Figure 3 summarizes these findings.

Insert Figure 3

As for kinds of books read in their free time during the last year, the rural group reported 12 different kinds of books. The seventh graders as a whole reported 13 kinds of books, while the most mature seventh grade readers reported 17 kinds of books read in the year. The university freshmen reported an average of eight books. It appears that these rural senior high students have either not yet narrowed their interests (if you look at the scores from the negative perspective) or have focused more


TIME SPENT IN LEISURE BOOK READING
ON A VACATION DAY
AVERAGE NUMBER OF MINUTES
150
125
100
75
50
25
0
SEVENTH GRADERS
RURAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN
899
185
409
NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN EACH GROUP


TIME SPENT IN LEISURE BOOK READING
ON A SCHOOL DAY (WEDNESDAY)
AVERAGE NUMBER OF MINUTES
150
125
100
75
50
25
0
SEVENTH GRADERS
RURAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN
899
185
409
NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN EACH GROUP

strongly on what interests them (if you view the scores from a positive perspective). Figure 4 summarizes these results.

Insert Figure 4

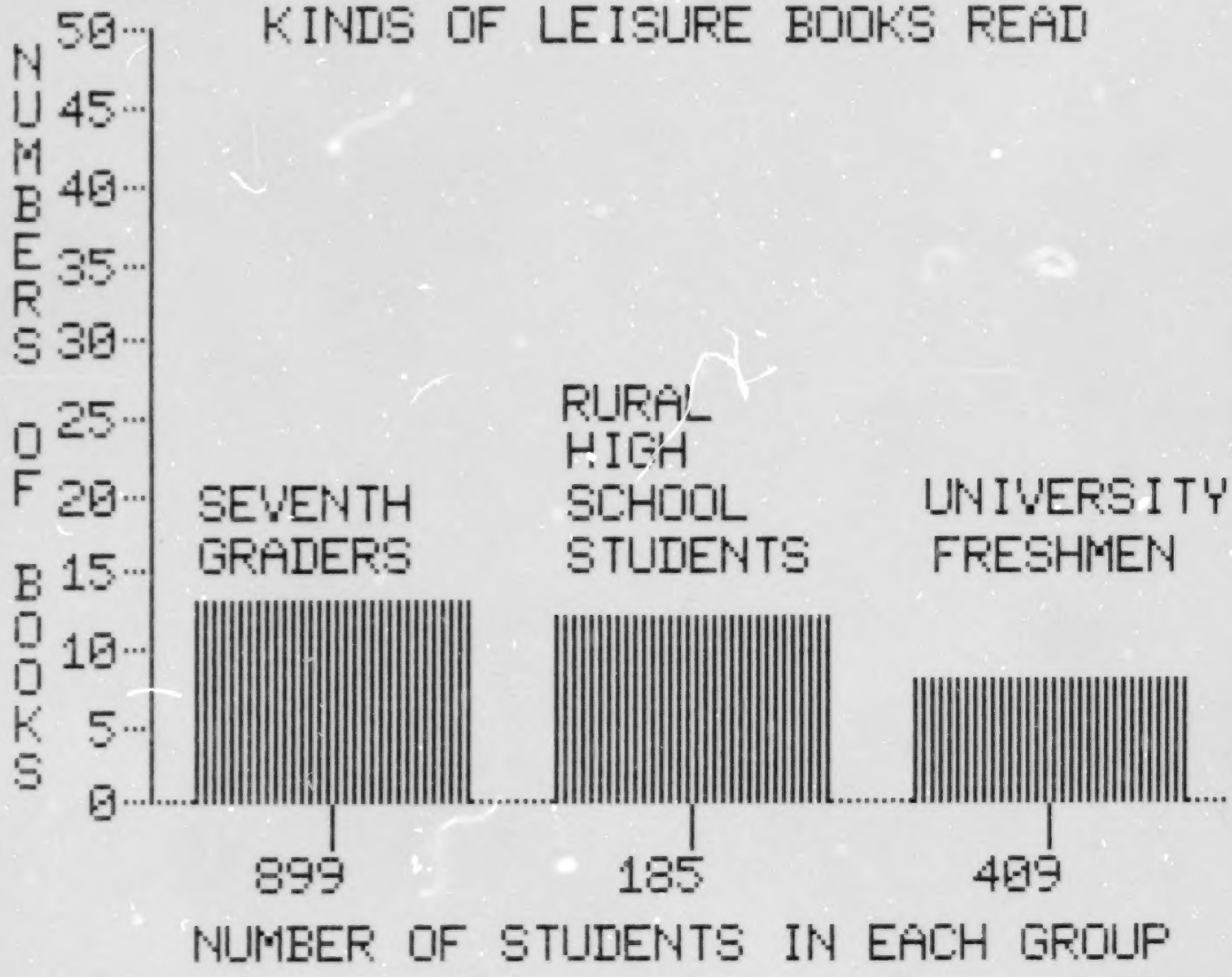
Regarding reasons for engaging in leisure book reading, all groups seemed to have about the same average number of motives for reading: the rural group - 7 reasons; the seventh graders - 7 reasons; the 409 freshmen - 5 reasons. Figure 5 summarizes these findings.

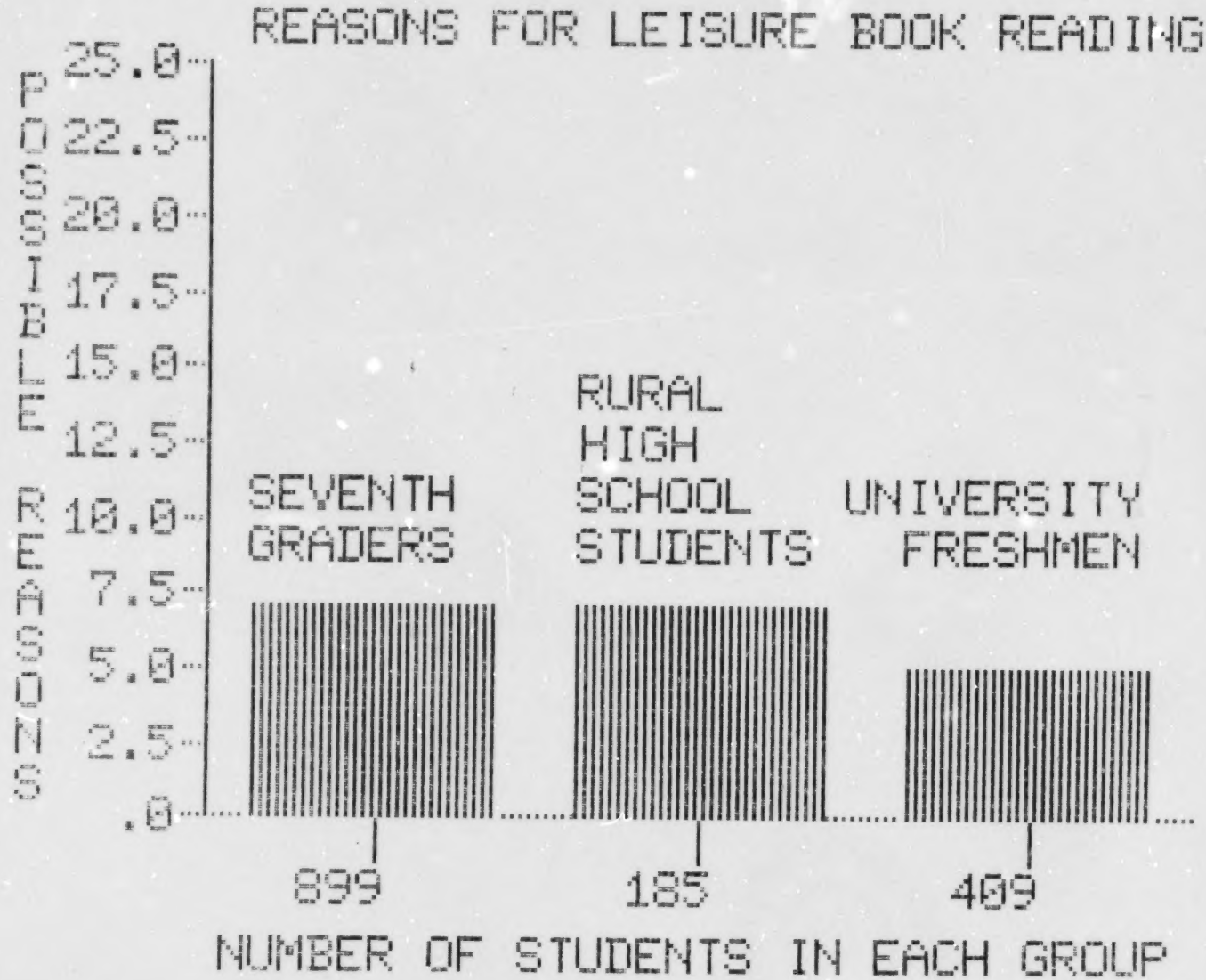
Insert Figure 5

To wrap up the funded portion of the project, the teachers asked that we send each of the participating districts the scores their students received on each part and question of the reading inventory. They also were quite interested in seeing how the scores of students in their respective schools compared with those of the entire 188 college-bound students in the county. To simplify this reporting, we sent each district a copy of the inventory and placed in numerator/denominator fashion two numbers at the end of each part and item in the reading inventory. For example, at the end of the attitude scale, we typed in "64/60." This meant that their district received an average score of 64 points on reading attitude, in contrast to the average county score of 60. In this way, each district could see how it compared with the college-bound students in the county, but would not be able to make specific comparisons with individual schools.

Subsequent Analyses

After the funded portion of the project was over, we took the time to conduct a few additional statistical analyses. We used analysis of


KINDS OF LEISURE BOOKS READ
PERCENTAGE OF BOOKS READ
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
SEVENTH GRADERS
RURAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN
899
185
409
NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN EACH GROUP


REASONS FOR LEISURE BOOK READING
PERCENT WHO AGREED
25.0
22.5
20.0
17.5
15.0
12.5
10.0
7.5
5.0
2.5
.0
SEVENTH GRADERS
RURAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN
899
185
409
NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN EACH GROUP

variance followed by Tukey comparisons to see if there were any statistically significant differences among the various groups. Significant statistical differences are ones that occur far beyond "happenstance." We wondered if we would uncover any insights worth sharing with other audiences. Our findings were quite favorable toward our college-bound rural group.

First of all, they confirmed our initial observation (based upon simple observation of average scores) that there were no significant differences among the various groups in attitude toward leisure book reading. The college-bound rural students had attitudes that were no worse or no better than those of the other groups.

On the question "On an average day during vacation, how much time would you say you spent reading books of your own choosing," the analysis of variance followed by a Tukey comparison indicated that the 68 minutes of leisure book reading on the part of the rural high school students was significantly ($p < .05$) higher than the 38 minutes average of the university freshmen. In other words, our rural, college-bound high school student group spent more time in leisure book reading during their vacation times than did university freshmen.

On the last time spent question (Wednesday of last week, which for all groups happened to be a school day), the rural groups' average time of 40 minutes devoted to leisure book reading was significantly ($p < .05$) greater than the average times of each of the other groups (i.e., seventh graders = 35 minutes and 409 university freshmen = 10 minutes). Apparently, the rural group reads leisure books quite avidly during the week. Parents, teachers, peer pressure or other influences must be encouraging the practice of mature reading behaviors in these rural areas.

On the question dealing with kinds of books students actually read in their free time "during the last year," the average reported by the rural high school students (12.2 books) did not differ significantly from the mean reported by 908 seventh graders (13.4 books). The mean for rural high school students, however, was significantly greater than the mean for college freshmen (8.1 books).

When asked to identify the reasons for reading books of their choosing, the rural high school students had a mean of 7.0 reasons. This mean did not differ significantly from the mean of seventh graders (7.3 reasons). However, it was significantly greater than the mean number of reasons for reading books of their choosing listed by college freshmen (5.3 reasons).

In summary, it appears that rural high school students have an attitude toward leisure reading that does not differ appreciably from that of seventh graders or university freshmen. They are similar to seventh graders in terms of amount of time spent in leisure reading during vacation; they read slightly more than university freshmen. Rural high school students have a wider breadth of reading interests than do university freshmen and list more reasons for reading then do university freshmen.

15 Ways to Develop Maturity in Reading in Small, Rural Schools

Teachers and administrators who want to place greater emphasis on maturity in reading in their schools can adapt any of the following suggestions:

1. Give the Reading Inventory. Set up your own local norms. Or compare your students' scores to those contained in this report. (For $1 - the cost of postage, handling, and paper - we will gladly send you a copy of the reading inventory used in this project. Write to: Gerald H. Maring, Ph.D.
Department of Education
Washington State University
Pullman, WA 99164-2110

2. Have students in your school keep a leisure/enrichment reading diary.

3. Develop classroom or building book exchanges.

4. Encourage teachers in your school or district to read Daniel Fader's paperback Hooked on Books (Berkeley, 1981). Ask them to particularly consider how his key ideas of saturation and diffusion could apply to your school or district.

5. See if you can implement a form of silent sustained reading (SSR). The following sources are helpful: Sadowski, M.D., "An Attitude Survey for Sustained Silent Reading Programs," Journal of Reading, 1979-80, 23, 721-726; Cline, R.K.J. and Kretke, G.L., "An Evaluation of Long-Term SSR in the Junior High School," Journal of Reading, 1979-80, 23, 503-506.

6. Implement applicable ideas in publications like Reading for Pleasure: Guidelines for Parents, Librarians, and Teachers and Motivating Reluctant Readers. These and related publications are available from the International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, Newark, DE 19711.

7. Make available to your students the annotated booklists that are published by the National Council of Teachers of English. Your Reading: A Booklist for Junior High Students (1600 recent titles in all subject and interest areas) and Books for You: A Booklist for Senior High Students are available in paperback form from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.

8. Survey teachers in various subject matter areas for titles of recent best sellers and other important books that could be read for leisure as well as enrichment in various content areas.

9. Have your PSTA coordinate book fairs.

10. If a bookmobile is available in your area, make sure it stops regularly at your school.

11. Encourage teachers to read aloud to students in keeping with the suggestions and guidelines in the national best seller, The Read Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease (a Penguin Books paperback, 1981).

12. Display book jackets of new arrivals at your school library. Place plastic covers over the book jackets of newly acquired library books.

13. Have "take one/they're free" tables and displays for paperback books donated by faculty and community persons who are avid readers.

14. Have a school, district, or county read-a-thon. Contact your state multiple sclerosis society for guidelines.

15. Circulate among your staff copies of these two journal articles:

Maring, Gerald H., "Maturity in Reading for Seventh Graders," Journal of Reading, 22:325-331, January 1979.

Maring, Gerald H., "Reading Improvement in the Gymnasium," Journal of Reading, 24:27-31, October 1980.

Maring, Gerald H. and Mary Ann Shea, "Skills Are Not Enough In College Developmental Reading," Journal of Reading, 25: 786-791, May 1982.